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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was sent to 230 private nursery schools in Northwest Los Angeles County to determine the schools' willingness to enroll children with handicaps. Of the 72 schools that responded, 60 were agreeable to having children with handicaps referred to them, 27 had children presently attending with physical handicaps, and 17 had children with mental handicaps. Reasons cited for not accepting handicapped children were lack of trained staff (29 schools), inappropriate facilities (15), and lack of appropriate license (10 schools). Respondents were most willing to accept partially deaf children and least willing to accept severely mentally children. (LS)

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Are Preschools Willing to Integrate Children with Handicaps?[1]

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A survey was undertaken to determine the willingness of preschools in Northwest Los Angeles County to enroll children with handicaps.

The results showed an overwhelming majority of the respondents agreeable to having children with handicaps referred to them. Some schools indicated they presently integrated children with handicaps. The reason cited most frequently for rejecting children with handicaps was lack of trained staff.

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[1]This study was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Service, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Grant No. 55-P-45144/9-03, "Careers in Integrated Early Childhood Programs" .

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ARE PRESCHOOLS WILLING TO INTEGRATE CHILDREN WITH HANDICAPS?[1]

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The integration rather than the segregation of children with handicaps was endorsed by many professionals in the field of exceptional children including the President's Panel on Mental Retardation (1969), the work of Rubin, et al. (1966) and Dunn (1969, 1970). Further impetus to this trend was given by the passage in Congress, October 1972, of Public Law 92424 requiring Headstart programs to enroll at least 10% handicapped children.

Recognizing the movement toward noncategorical programs, a project "Careers in Integrated Early Childhood Programs" was initiated in September 1971 at California State University, Northridge Preschool Laboratory to train personnel to staff integrated early childhood programs.

The publicity given to the integrated project resulted in numerous calls from physicians, parents, psychologists, clinics, and agencies desiring placement of children with handicaps in the University Preschool Laboratory. Since only 12 children with handicaps were accommodated in the

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school's four classes with a total enrollment of 64 children, the need arose to seek other referral resources. Another important need for identifying additional nursery schools was to notify school directors of the availability of teachers trained to work in integrated early childhood programs. In order to locate preschools willing to enroll children with handicaps, an initial survey was undertaken in April 1973 in the Northwest District of Los Angeles County.

METHOD

A questionnaire was constructed which sought information concerning the staff, tuition, hours of operation, total enrollment, willingness to accept referrals of children with handicaps and if so, the nature of the handicap they would accommodate.

The questionnaire was sent to 230 state licensed private nursery schools listed in a directory prepared by the State of California, Human Relations Agency, Department of Social Welfare. The schools were located in the Northwest District of Los Angeles County which includes San Fernando Valley and adjoining communities. Head Start programs were not included in the study. A cover letter explained the purpose of the survey.

RESULTS

A total of 72 questionnaires were returned. An analysis of the responses using frequency distributions and percentages

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indicated that 83% or 60 of the respondents answered positively to the question "Are you willing to accept referrals of children with handicaps now?".

The schools ranged in enrollment from 10-126 and above children, with a mean of 50 children. They had an adult to child ratio of 1:4 to 1:10 with a mean of 1:8. Tuition ranged from 10 to 79 dollars per month with a mean cost of $40 for three 1/2 day mornings per week. Cost of a full day, five times a week schedule ranged from 70 to 119 dollars per month with a mean of $90. Twenty seven of the schools indicated that they had children presently attending with physical handicaps. Seventeen schools noted that they now included children with mental handicaps. No description of the nature of these handicaps was indicated. The reasons cited for not enrolling children with handicaps were lack of staff with special training (29 schools), inappropriate facilities (15), lack of appropriate license (10 schools). Philosophy opposed to integration of children was not considered a reason for enrolling children with handicaps.

In answer to the question "If referrals of children with handicaps were made to your school - which children would you be willing to enroll?". The type and severity of handicap a particular school was willing to enroll ranged from one to 13 with a mean of five. The handicap which was selected most frequently as acceptable for referral to the

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respondents was Partially Deaf, whereas the handicap receiving least acceptance was Severe Mental Retardation.

Table 1 shows the handicaps included in the questionnaire and the number of schools willing to include children with these handicaps in their program.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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SUMMARY

Although the sample was small, the fact that the great majority of directors returning the questionnaire were positive in their attitudes toward integration is indicative that the trend toward mainstreaming children with handicaps into all phases of community life is taking hold. In addition, the identification of these schools opens up much sought after community nursery school placement resources for young children with handicaps. It is interesting to note that 10 schools gave licensing as the reason they would not enroll children with handicaps. They incorrectly believed that their license prevented their including children with handicaps, while in reality the law applying in their district states "...Children who are physically handicapped or emotionally disturbed shall not be accepted, unless it is determined that; there will be no adverse affect upon other children, either through direct behavior of the child or through requiring staff time needed by other

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children, and the nursery is able to meet the individual needs of the child." The misinterpretation of the law will be brought to the attention of the respondents.

More extensive surveys of this type should be mounted and provisions made for updating the data so that appropriate placements can be made for individual children. The resources offered by the schools participating in this survey will be published and made available to the various agencies in the community.

The information published will not include any value judgments as to the nature or quality of the "accepting" nursery schools. It was felt that a questionnaire was an inadequate method of obtaining data relative to the nature or quality of the school's program and staff. Further, it was believed that parents and agencies seeking nursery schools for children with handicaps would assume the responsibility for assessing the appropriateness of a particular "accepting" school for a particular child.

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TABLE 1

[1]Preschools in Northwest Los Angeles County
Accepting and Rejecting of children with handicaps

N=72

Handicap	Accepting	Non-Accepting
Epilepsy	20	52
Partial Deafness	45	27
Profound Deafness	10	62
Partial Blindness	33	39
Total Blindness	7	65
Orthopedic Handicap	26	46
Mild Cerebral Palsy	26	46
Severe Cerebral Palsy	2	70
Emotional Disturbance	20	52
Autism	9	63
Mild Mental Retardation	36	36
Down's Syndrome	15	57
Severe Mental Retardation	1	71

[1]Preschools responding to questionnaire: N=72

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